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Domestic surveillance

Weather Underground opens a door for the CIA...

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WASHINGTON — "I think that what we've seen in Nyack, N.Y., is the tip of the iceberg. The plans go much deeper than that. The plans are for terrorists to upset the government of the United States."

That was the warning we received last week in an interview with former FBI official, W. Mark Felt, following the tragic murder of two police officers and an armed guard during a \$1.6 million bank robbery involving fugitive members of the radical Weather Underground organization.

"I believe the Weather Underground has ties with other terrorist organizations," declared the former acting associate director of the FBI, who was found guilty last year of conspiring to violate the constitutional rights of Weather Underground members and their relatives during the early 1970s. He was later pardoned by President Reagan.

While our own anxieties about American-bred terrorism have been heightened by the appalling homicides in Rockland County, N.Y., we're watching the official reaction to the incident with interest. Federal investigators have already pounced on evidence of possible links between Weather Underground members, the Black Liberation Army, FALN (Puerto Rican nationalists) and the Irish Republican Army.

Sometime soon, the Reagan administration and certain members of Congress are likely to use the Nyack massacre in arguments for bringing the CIA back into the surveillance of domestic radical organizations. Under a proposed executive order, the White House would allow the CIA to exchange information with federal, state and local agencies.

Yet, before reopening the door to domestic spying, both the White House and Congress should place the Nyack revelations in an historical context.

In 1968, the 100-plus member Weatherman organization was born on the narrowly held conviction that only violent acts against the American establishment could stop the Vietnam War. The ensuing campaign to "Bring the War Home" resulted in bombing attacks on bank buildings and other public places. Although American citizens were allegedly not targets, the violence inevitably injured innocent people.

Former Weatherman Bo Burlingham explained the fringe nature of the group in the book, *The Sixties*:

"We felt like miners trapped in a terrible, poisonous shaft with no light to guide us out. We resolved to destroy the tunnel even if we risked destroying ourselves in the process.

"It all seemed simple and frightening. We organized into tight, closed collectives, which enabled us to sustain our courage and commitment, but which shut us off from the world outside."

Before long, Burlingham and a majority of his comrades realized that, whatever their despair over the war, perpetrating violence at home was no way to bring about positive change. They dropped out. But a small faction would continue their self-destructive ways under a new name, the Weather Underground, and be linked to bombings as late as 1975 (including an explosion in a bathroom in the U.S. Capitol).

While anti-war leaders took pains to distance their efforts from those of the Weather Underground, they had trouble convincing federal authorities of the distinction. Intelligence agents used the pretext of anti-terrorism and suspected foreign sponsorship to investigate large numbers of Americans who disagreed with the government's Vietnam policy.

As many may remember, this far-reaching campaign involved infiltration of domestic dissident groups, illegal wiretapping and interference with the U.S. mails.

Try as they may, U.S. intelligence

agencies could find no hard links between the anti-war movement and unfriendly foreign powers. Yet, they sacrificed the rights of a few in the name of safeguarding the interests of the nation.

Though the hysterical days of the Vietnam protests are long over, paranoia about a possible resurgence of dissent and violence may well prompt the Reagan administration and Congress to take the Weather Underground out of its logical historical context. Its reappearance on the front pages is likely to spark claims among CIA and FBI backers of "I told you so" and result in a return to the

intelligence-gathering attitudes of old.

Of course, anyone familiar with the anti-war movement and current dissident groups knows that the Weather Underground is at most a lunatic cell group that has no support on the left or anywhere else.

We should avoid buckling under the grisly shock of terrorist-linked murders in Rockland County and carefully evaluate pending national security plans. After all, the combined efforts of state and federal lawmen landed a bounty of suspected terrorists without the help of proposed changes in federal law.